

**Testimony of Jocelyn Ault
For the Education Committee
March 13, 2019**

Re:

**HB 7312 AA Establishing a Task Force to Study Issues Relating to Parental Involvement with Students
SB 1021 AAC A Comprehensive Community Schools Pilot Program**

Thank you Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee for considering my testimony. My name is Jocelyn Ault and I strongly support both HB 7312 which focuses on family and community engagement, and SB 1021 to support a Comprehensive Community Schools Pilot Program.

It is critical to support HB 7312, which would establish a task force on parent engagement. We talk about why “they” don’t get involved and assign blame which serves to exacerbate the divide between our schools and families. Our daily practices often exclude families, particularly those who have not had positive experiences with educational institutions themselves. We must listen to and partner with families as well as invest in high-impact, evidence-based strategies that break the barriers entrenched in the current system. I have seen the transformation that happens when schools build relationships of trust and include families as equal partners. By high impact I don’t mean expensive but rather evidence-based with a return of invested time and money. For example, instituting a school culture of partnership that starts by asking a parent, “What are your hopes and dreams for your child?”, as done in the Parent Teacher Home Visit Project which is supported by CEA and CSDE. This is just one high-impact example which also has the benefit of improving staff cultural competency faster than any classroom training is capable of. Keeping the divide is costly and wastes precious dollars to maintain a status quo that is not working and instead maintains cyclical patterns of student disengagement particularly within “failing schools.”

If you aren’t convinced to vote for HB 7312, I ask a simple question. Who encouraged you to go to school? Listening to and creating true family partnerships is key to school success in all aspects, starting with students being there.

Complimenting this, is SB 1021 to pilot and explore the impact of forming true comprehensive community schools. Recent studies of community schools have identified the keys that differentiate practices leading to success. Research shows simply adding wrap around services results in limited success. SB 1021 promotes piloting a comprehensive community school model to bring together academics, health & social services, community development, and parental engagement to turn around struggling schools, disrupt the school-to-prison-pipeline, and bring strength to whole communities. These schools are collaborative and transformative. I believe one of the differences between top and low performing districts is an opportunity gap that is very related to economics. This is an opportunity-generating model for students that is being done in communities using partnerships and grants. Comprehensive community schools leverage the assets of the community. Sometimes what we even consider deficits can become assets. What if our most diverse communities became sought after environments to prepare for a global economy? Comprehensive community schools combine challenging and culturally relevant learning opportunities with the academic and social supports each and every child needs to reach their potential. To give just one example, through a partnership at Fannie Lou Hammer Freedom High School (a community school in the poorest U.S. Congressional district) students are helping to clean up toxins in the East River in the Bronx and they are using these experiences to create a pathway to filling STEM occupations. Year-over-year of classwork is not only changing the river but also educating the whole community on environmental impacts.

Our most challenged districts have faced leadership and teacher turnover that is destabilizing and makes sustained growth difficult. In the comprehensive community school model, effective transformation comes

from all the stakeholders being part of the change and “having skin” in the transformation. We consistently invest more and more but our current top down processes often fail because the leadership changed. Strong community schools instead are sustained by the broad support they enjoy from their communities. Continuity is built into the model and ultimately statistics show improved retention of staff and students in these schools. They represent the ultimate purpose of our schools: to prepare young people to discover and pursue their aspirations and participate fully in our economy and democracy. These are schools where diversity is embraced and assets of each group are incorporated in solutions; forming stronger communities as well as radically changing the outcomes for students.

In my work in Bridgeport I know there is a swell of support as knowledge of the comprehensive community school model grows with educators, students, parents, grandparents and community organizations that are wanting to partner with schools to provide resources. You will hear from people who have been working there with their own experiences, including the BEAPS community organizing initiative.

Building a highly successful educational system for all the children of Connecticut has been a struggle. Are we putting our money in the right places? Community school partnerships yield a strong social return on investment, with studies finding that every dollar invested in such schools produced over a \$10 return in social value. The Learning Policy Institute in a 2017 brief recommends comprehensive community schools as an evidence-based strategy for equitable school improvement that states should consider for implementation of ESSA. Key in funding a community schools is to include a Community School Coordinator as part of the leadership team to coordinate the relationships and help schools actualize and incorporate the student, parent and community partnerships. We can leverage our resources and build sustainable high performing schools. I support piloting this with fidelity to the CEA model such that success can be replicated throughout the state.

Family partnerships in education and the community school model are supported in the framework of collective impact and thus also support the two-generation work being undertaken to change cycles of poverty and strengthen our state. We need to find ways to disrupt what drains our resources and instead invest in practices that will build the kind of educational infrastructure that our businesses and communities need.

Please support these two bills and use these to jumpstart sustainable initiatives to engage all students with the support of their families and communities. Let us support our teachers and staff in ways that pay big dividends in and out of the classroom. I have worked in Human Resources in large corporations and believe that our schools have to better prepare all students to join our workforce.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or I can help in any fashion: 203-520-7115 or jocelyn.ault@gmail.com. Thank you for your consideration.

Submitted by Jocelyn Ault
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